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ABSTRACT

The methods and objectives of teaching Arabic in the Arab world are outlined here. In elementary school (ages 6-12) about 1/3 of the instructional time is allotted to teaching Arabic. It aims to provide the child with basic skills in reading, conversation and writing. The speech taught is that of modern Arabic used by educated speakers. Reading instruction combines the global or sentence method with the analytical or alphabet method. The preparatory or intermediate school covers ages 12-15. Teaching of Arabic at this stage aims at enabling the student to master the language as a tool for oral and written communication, to read a wide variety of materials of various types and for different purposes, and to start exploring the literature of the Arabic language. Oral and written expression are emphasized and grammar is studied intensively. Secondary school students are aged 15-18, and most go on to the university. This school serves to complete the education of the good citizen and to prepare him for fields of specialization at university level. Mastery of reading and writing skills is sought and past and present Arabic literature is studied. Teacher education and trends in teaching Arabic are also outlined. (CHK)

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The Teaching of Arabic in the Arab World

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The Teaching of Arabic in the Arab World

WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES of teaching Arabic in schools in the Arab World? How is it taught? How is the program of instruction organized? What place does the teaching of Arabic occupy in the curriculum? What are the teaching materials that are being used? To what extent are they effective? What kind of training does the teacher of the Arabic language receive? Finally, what are the new trends in the teaching of Arabic, and what are the factors influencing them?

These are some of the questions which arise when tackling the topic assigned to me, namely, "The Teaching of Arabic in the Arab World." Before attempting to answer them, I would like to state that such answers as are given here are based primarily upon the teaching of Arabic in the United Arab Republic. The proper treatment of the subject would require a series of comprehensive studies on the teaching of Arabic in each of the Arab countries; such studies, however, have not yet been carried out. However, in the light of my experience as consultant and participant in drawing up the curricula of Arabic and in preparing teaching materials for several Arab countries, I am convinced that the teaching of Arabic follows a general pattern in most of the Arab countries. I would like to add the answers given to the above-mentioned questions will be mainly concerned with the teaching of Arabic in the three stages of general education, namely,

the elementary stage, the intermediate or preparatory stage, and the secondary school stage. Thus, the teaching of Arabic at the college or university level will be beyond the scope of our discussion. Some reference, however, will be made to those institutions as they affect the professional training of the teachers of Arabic.

TEACHING OF ARABIC IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

In almost all the Arab countries, elementary education is now free and compulsory for all the children between the ages of six and twelve. The main function of the elementary school is to provide the children with the attitudes, habits, concepts, knowledge, and skills necessary for their physical, mental, emotional, and social development. Since language plays an important role in the various aspects of the development of the children, the teaching of Arabic looms large in the program of instruction. A little less than one-third of the time devoted to instruction in the elementary school is allotted to the teaching of Arabic. As a matter of fact, it receives more than that share because the information, explanations, and exercises given in the other subjects contribute greatly to the child's growth in Arabic.

The main objective of teaching Arabic in the elementary school is to develop in the child the abilities and skills which will enable him to participate effectively in the reading activities carried out by most of the literate members of the society, and to express his ideas, both orally and in written form, with a reasonable degree of clarity and correctness. At the end of the elementary school, the child is expected to be able to read with understanding some lines in a newspaper or a magazine and a few pages in books written for the general reader. He is also expected to be able to carry on simple discussions and to tell a story or give a short account of an incident which he has seen, heard or read. Above all, he is expected to write a short letter or a few lines in which he expresses an idea. To sum up, one can say that the teaching of Arabic at the elementary school aims at providing the child with the basic skills in reading, conversation and writing.

Recognizing the linguistic background of the child and the nature of his language development, the program of instruction during the six years of the elementary school is organized in terms of three successive stages, each stage covering two years. During the first two years the teaching of Arabic is dealt with in terms of broad areas rather than narrow branches. Thus, the time allotted weekly for Arabic is divided into two blocks: one for conversation, storytelling, songs, and recitations; and one for reading and writing. The purpose of this division, of course, is not to establish sharp and definite boundaries between the various aspects of the language arts, but rather to help the teacher give equal attention to each of those aspects. At the beginning, the oral activities, such as conversation, storytelling, songs, and simple poetry, receive most of the attention. Reading comes next in order. Simple writing activities begin to receive due care towards the end of the first year. In dealing with conversation, storytelling, and the other types of oral expression, the teacher is instructed not to impose upon the child the classical pattern. Instead, he is directed to accept what they say and encourage them to move gradually towards the adoption of that modern pattern of Arabic used by the educated members of the society. This principle is applied all the way through the elementary school, though with varying degrees of emphasis from grade to grade.

The method used in teaching reading during those two years is an eclectic method which combines the global or the sentence method with the analytical or the alphabet method. According to that method, the child starts by learning to read sentences. As he acquires some facility in reading sentences and recognizing words, he begins to analyze the sentences into words. After acquiring enough sight vocabulary, he starts through phonetic and structural analysis to analyze words into letters and to learn the sounds and forms of the letters. Along with learning the sounds and forms of letters, the child learns to combine letters and to form new words. All these processes go on as drills and exercises while the child is progressing in reading sentences. Thus, they combine the skills involved in

word recognition with those involved in understanding. Although more emphasis is laid upon oral reading at this stage, due care is given to silent reading. Books and other teaching materials, such as cards, charts, games, etc., have been developed and put at the teacher's disposal to help him in achieving his goals. In conclusion, one can safely say that by the end of the second year the child acquires the basic skills in word recognition and is able to read, with understanding, a few lines of simple Arabic.

In the third and fourth grades a few changes take place in the program of teaching Arabic. Although the interest in the oral aspects of the language continues, the writing aspects receive more attention. Thus, more time is devoted to written expression than before and more exercises and drills in spelling and handwriting are given. The teaching of reading also witnesses a change, i.e. in shifting the emphasis from the development of skills in word recognition and comprehension to the achievement of a fair degree of fluency in reading. The pupils therefore are supplied with textbooks and supplementary reading materials prepared especially for this purpose. These materials have been carefully planned so as to provide the pupils with ample opportunity to apply their newly acquired skills. Moreover, during these two years, reading ceases to be an end in itself, and is used as a tool for the acquisition of new information and experiences. In addition to the changes taking place in the previously mentioned areas, a new area comes into being, namely, linguistic usage. This term refers, in this connection, to those aspects of Arabic grammar which are most essential for usage and at the same time are urgently needed by the pupils in order to move to modern literary Arabic. In the period allotted to language usage, the pupils receive instruction in the use of personal, demonstrative, and relative pronouns; in the use of singular, dual, and plural; in questioning and answering; in the use of the negative; in the use of the imperative mood, etc. No grammatical terms or rules are given at this stage, the aim being drill in usage. Although there are textbooks to help the teacher in training his pupils on the various items of usage,

most of that training is done orally. Every care is taken to ensure that the exercises and drills provided for training in usage are meaningful and derived from the life experiences of the pupils.

During the last two years of the elementary school, the program of instruction in Arabic is well differentiated. Special periods are assigned for each of the branches of reading, oral and written expression, grammar, recitation, and spelling and handwriting. Moreover, the one teacher who used to teach the class all the subjects is now replaced by a number of teachers, among whom there is one specializing in the teaching of Arabic. More important are the changes taking place in the teaching of the various branches of Arabic, especially reading, expression, and grammar.

Again, in the teaching of reading, there is a shift of emphasis. Since the pupils have become quite skilled in word recognition, they devote more attention to building up vocabulary and acquiring skill in understanding and interpreting what is read. They also embark upon reading more difficult types of materials, types which approach the normal style used in newspapers, magazines, and the like. Although silent and oral reading continues to be practiced at this stage, the former receives almost an equal share of attention.

The teaching of written expression is treated on an equal basis with oral expression. In addition to writing short compositions on topics familiar to them, the pupils are trained in writing letters, notices, memoranda, short accounts, summaries, and simple reports. In oral expression they receive training in giving talks, relating stories and anecdotes, group discussions, and holding meetings and keeping records thereof. Whether in oral or written expression, the pupils are directed to give due care to the content of what they try to communicate. They are constantly encouraged to have something to say and to say it clearly. This of course does not mean that matters of grammar and sentence structure are neglected; it only means that these matters do not occupy the position which they used to occupy in the teaching of composition previously.

We have seen that in the third and fourth grades the pupils are informally taught the essential usages of the Arabic language. Undoubtedly, this paves the way for a course of simple grammar given during the last two grades of the elementary school. The aim of this course is to intensify the habits acquired previously and to acquire new ones. The contents of the course revolve around the most widely used patterns of the Arabic sentence and the necessary concepts and rules governing them. Although understanding is one of the basic outcomes required of the pupils, every effort is made to help them transfer what they have understood into speech and writing habits. The teaching method used is a deductive one. According to this method, a meaningful text is presented to the pupils. After reading and discussing the meaning of the text, they begin, under the guidance of the teacher, to draw out the sentences representing the grammatical term or rule. Then they proceed to analyze these sentences and observe the specific features that are worthy of observation. On the basis of these observations they draw a general conclusion which states the rule or summarizes the aspect of grammar under study. Finally come the drills and exercises which provide opportunities for application. Although there are grammar textbooks, the teacher usually uses them for review and drills. At the initial stages of the lesson, he either prepares the text to be presented or obtains it from the compositions of the pupils or from the books which they are likely to read. This practice is followed by many teachers because it has proved worthwhile as far as motivation is concerned.

To sum up, we may say that the elementary school takes the child at the age of six, with an established pattern of speech habits, and moves him gradually to the world of the printed page, the written expression, and the speech of the educated members of his society. During this stage he is exposed to six years of training in speech, reading, writing, and grammar. In addition, this stage lays the foundations upon which the future development of the child is based.

TEACHING OF ARABIC IN THE PREPARATORY OR INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL

The preparatory or the intermediate school corresponds to the junior high school in the American educational system. It is a three-year school which takes the pupils from the age of twelve to the age of fifteen. Not all the pupils who complete their elementary education can go to the preparatory school. To be admitted, the pupil has to pass a competitive entrance examination in reading, writing, arithmetic, geometry, and general knowledge, which includes general science, civics, elementary geography, and history. The main function of this school is to widen the child's horizon, raise his level of achievement in the above-mentioned subjects, and provide him with a wide variety of experiences which will help him discover his special abilities, aptitudes, and interests.

The teaching of Arabic in the preparatory school aims at enabling the student to master the language as a tool for oral and written communication, to read a wide variety of materials of various types and for different purposes, and to start exploring the literature of the Arabic language. The time allotted to the teaching of Arabic is a little less than one-fourth of the total time of the school. This time is distributed among the various branches of composition, reading, recitation, grammar, and spelling. Much has already been said about the general pattern of teaching, and it therefore seems advisable to concentrate here on the main features of the program in each of those branches.

With regard to the teaching of composition, more demands are put upon the student in both oral and written composition. At the end of this stage he is expected to meet the demands of life situations requiring oral and written expression. He is therefore trained in delivering speeches, giving instructions, conducting meetings, and holding group discussions. He is also trained in writing compositions, reports, articles, memoranda, and letters dealing with matters that are of social import. At this stage more stress is laid upon such matters as the organization of ideas as well as clarity and correctness of expression.

In reading, the student spends more time than in any other language activity. He reads in the class under the direct supervision of the teacher; he reads in the school library under the supervision of the teacher-librarian; and he reads at home. His guided reading covers a wide variety of subjects. The teacher is always alert to widen his interests both from the point of view of topic and from the historical point of view. As soon as the teacher feels that the interests of the student have begun to focus on a certain area he works towards deepening those interests. Besides, the teaching of reading tries to develop in the students skills in interpreting and summarizing what they read, skills in using the library effectively, and skills in choosing books. The students are also taught how to read for various purposes, and how to adapt their speed and processes of reading to varying needs. Oral reading continues to be regarded as an important element in reading. This may be due to the inflectional nature of the Arabic language. The objective of teaching oral reading at this stage, however, differs from that of the previous stage. Instead of aiming at correctness, its aim becomes good oral expression of the meaning.

In the lessons devoted to the recitation, the student studies a wide variety of literary pieces. These pieces are selected not only for their literary merit but also for their social and humanistic values. In studying a piece, the student, under the guidance of the teacher, tries to understand its meaning, reach its wider implications, and appreciate its literary and other values. Although the pieces chosen represent both poetry and prose, the great majority of them are poems. Furthermore, most of these poems are written by either contemporary or modern poets. In the third year, however, some samples of Classical Arabic literature begin to appear.

With regard to grammar, the intermediate school seems to be the period of intensive training. Almost all the main topics of the Arabic grammar are spread over the three years of this school. The rationale behind this is that the students should acquire the basic forms of Classical Arabic before they begin studying its literature in the secondary school. Moreover,

the student in the intermediate school should complete studying the mechanics of the language while he is busy trying to perfect the arts of communication. Whatever the reasons may be, the student spends three years struggling with the rules of grammar and the forms of Classical Arabic. The situation, however, is much alleviated by the efforts made by teachers in using the proper methods of teaching. Suitable textbooks also add to the enlivening of the situation.

It should be added that some attention is given at the beginning of the intermediate stage to the teaching of spelling. This is done to round up the training given in the previous stage as well as to provide some remedial training for weaker students. This concern with spelling ceases at the end of the first year.

To sum up, one can say that the intermediate school receives the pupil from the elementary school with little more than the essential skills in the different language arts and tries, during its three years, to improve and build upon those skills until they become real communicative skills ready to function in any social situation. Moreover, the intermediate school provides its student with the tools necessary for the studying of Arabic literature at the secondary stage.

TEACHING ARABIC IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

The secondary school in the United Arab Republic corresponds to the senior high school in the American educational system. It is also a three-year school which takes the students from the age of fifteen to the age of eighteen. Most students graduating from this school go to the university, if they obtain high marks in the general school certificate examination; otherwise they work in white-collar jobs. This school serves two major functions: to complete the education of the good citizen and at the same time to prepare him for the various fields of specialization at the university level.

In briefly describing the program of teaching Arabic in this school, one can say that it aims mainly at enabling the student to master the reading and writing skills needed in his future work, to read with appreciation the literary works of the

present, and to know and appreciate the literary heritage of the past. A little less than one-fifth of the school time is devoted to the study of Arabic. This time is divided among the branches of reading, composition, literature, and rhetoric and literary criticism.

In the teaching of reading and composition the aim is to reach a level of maturity suitable to carry out the tasks required at the university level. What has been said about the methods of teaching and points of emphasis in the intermediate school can hold for this school if we raise the attainment to higher levels.

With regard to the study of literature, it should be said that during the first year the student begins by studying the literature of the Pre-Islamic, Islamic, and Ommiad periods. In the second year, he studies the literature of the first and second Abbasside periods. In the third year he proceeds from the Turkish period until he reaches contemporary literature. The studies always revolve around texts representing the literary production of the period. In studying a text, the students analyze it from the point of view of vocabulary, structure, meanings, images, and metaphors. They also try to throw light on it by studying the biography of its author. After completing several texts they begin to draw conclusions regarding the characteristics of the given literary period.

The study of rhetoric and literary criticism is based upon and supplemented by the study of literature. All the conclusions drawn from the study of literature are utilized in the lessons on rhetoric and literary criticism. Some of these lessons, however, are devoted to the study of modern forms of literary works such as the novel, the short story, the essay, and the drama.

The role of the secondary school in the program of teaching Arabic is, then, to develop the communicative skills of the students to the level of maturity, to develop their literary sensitivity and appreciation, and to familiarize them with the best works of literature in the past.

THE TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION OF THE TEACHER OF ARABIC

It has previously been mentioned that there are two kinds of teachers in the elementary school: the non-specialized teacher who teaches all the subjects to one class, and the specialized teacher who teaches one subject to a number of classes. The first type of teacher usually teaches the lower grades, whereas the second type teaches the last two grades.

Both types of teachers are graduates of the Normal school. To be admitted to this school, the student has to obtain his preparatory school certificate. In addition, he has to pass an interview which aims at recruiting the best candidates for admission. After being admitted in the Normal school, the student spends five years, at the end of which he obtains a certificate qualifying him as a teacher. The program of instruction during the first three years is somewhat similar to that of the ordinary secondary school with some emphasis on Arabic and social studies. The last two years are mainly devoted to professional preparation with its theoretical and practical training. The graduates of this school are qualified to teach all the subjects in the lower grades of the elementary school. To qualify as a teacher of a special subject, whether Arabic, mathematics or any other subject, the teacher has to attend a two-year advanced course in that subject and pass a qualifying examination.

The case of the teacher of Arabic in the intermediate and secondary school level is different. First, he has to be a graduate of the secondary school and score high marks in his school certificate examination to be admitted to the university. Secondly, he has to spend four years specializing in the study of the Arabic language and literature. These four years of study constitute his technical training. After obtaining his B.A., he has to spend one more year in the Faculty of Education in order to receive his professional training. Graduates of the Faculty of Education are usually appointed in intermediate schools. Those who show outstanding abilities and more progress are usually promoted to secondary schools.

In commenting on the technical preparation of teachers of Arabic, one may say that they receive intensive training in such aspects of the Arabic language as phonetics, historical philology, morphology, grammar and syntax, and Arabic literature. All the methods used and the results obtained by the various schools of oriental studies have their bearing on their program. The same can be said about the methods and results of the modern schools of linguistics.

NEW TRENDS IN THE TEACHING OF ARABIC

Several trends are under way in the teaching of Arabic in the United Arab Republic. I shall try to enumerate them briefly, pointing out the factors underlying them.

1. *More emphasis on ideas, thinking, and accuracy.* There is an emerging trend among the leaders of the Arabic teachers to get away from the exaggerated concern with verbalism and archaic forms which have been predominant in the teaching of Arabic for a long time. Instead, they want to put more emphasis on richness of ideas, sound thinking, and accurate expression. This may be due to the increasing role played by science and modern technology in our society. The wide and vigorous movement of translation from most living languages into Arabic may be another contributing factor. Whatever the reason may be, it remains true that such a trend will have a strong impact upon the teaching of Arabic, especially in composition, reading, and literature.

2. *The social orientation of the program of instruction.* The tremendous and deep changes which have been taking place during the last few years have rendered the existing program of instruction in Arabic obsolete. New social and political demands are made upon the youth of the country. Many school teachers and supervisors of instruction feel the need for a wide-range revision of the curriculum. They are asking for a new curriculum compatible with the new society.

3. *Due care should be given to the study of contemporary literature.* In describing the program of Arabic literature in the secondary school, it has been pointed out that most of the time is devoted to the study of the literature of the past.

Moreover, a good proportion of that time is spent on the study of one form of literary production, namely, poetry. This may have been acceptable three or four decades ago, when the current of literature was weak and the new forms of the novel, the essay, the short story, and the drama were almost unknown. As the situation has now changed and the literary movement is playing an important role in the lives of the people, a new trend has emerged. This trend is in the form of giving due attention to the study of contemporary literature.

4. *Introducing the mass media of communication in the program of instruction.* The press, the radio, and television are increasingly becoming essential elements in the life of our people. They therefore have a tremendous influence on the thinking, taste, appreciation, and opinion of the people. The leading circles in the teaching profession believe the school in general, and the teaching of Arabic in particular, have a great responsibility in guiding the citizens of tomorrow in how to live with, benefit from, as well as master these new media. The teaching of language, they feel, should not be confined to the book; it should extend its arms so as to embrace these new media as well.

5. *The use of scientific research in improving the teaching of Arabic.* The scientific study of the problems of education in our country dates back to the late twenties of this century. Due to various political and social factors, however, this movement was not able to yield fruitful results until the advent of the Revolution of July 1952. Since then, a great deal of attention has been given to research work, and many of the educational problems confronting the country have been subjected to scientific investigation. The teaching of Arabic is one of the areas in which research is being conducted. Studies have been made to determine the reading interests of children and adults, various types of reading tests have been developed, programs of evaluation have been devised, surveys are conducted to explore the mistakes of the pupils in spelling, investigations have been made to ascertain the factors underlying reading retardation of pupils. Efforts

have been directed to the building up of a word list for the Arabic language, and studies have been made to evaluate reading textbooks. All these efforts have had their impact upon the teaching of Arabic and the responsible authorities are now demanding more investigations for the improvement of the curriculum as well as teaching methods and materials.

This is but a quick survey of the field as seen from inside and, as it is rightly said, those who are observing it from outside will have a wider view and better look.

Thank you very much for listening, and I hope you will find some food for thinking in what I have said.